

July 27, 1999

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THE NAVY AND VIEQUES

HON. TONY P. HALL

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, July 27, 1999

Mr. HALL of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, in April, U.S. F-18 fighter jets accidentally dropped two 500-pound bombs on an observation post nearly a mile from their target on the Puerto Rican island of Vieques, killing a civilian and wounding four others. Although Vieques has housed a naval live-fire training facility for over 50 years, there are 9,300 civilians who live on the island.

The following research memorandum was authored by Rebecca Brezenoff, a Research Fellow with the Washington-based Council on Hemispheric Affairs (COHA). This timely and pertinent article investigates the issues and delves into the history of naval operations on the island of Vieques:

Washington now finds itself embroiled in a sticky problem on the little-known Puerto Rican Island of Vieques, the site of one of its more perplexing public relations nightmares. Recent tragic events resulting from the military's continuing use of most of the heavily inhabited but relatively small island as a live-weapons storage and training facility present the Clinton Administration with a growing need to reevaluate its policies there. The increasingly militant demonstrations now being staged in Puerto Rico against the Vieques facility and the unity of the Puerto Rican population on the issue suggest that the problem will not go away, but requires some hard decisions now.

The island-municipality, located just off Puerto Rico's southeastern coast, once again emerged into the national news following its latest fatal accident in April, when two Marine fighter jets on a night training run over Vieques missed their mark by a mile and dropped bombs near an observation post, killing a civilian security guard and injuring four other people. Certainly not the first serious incident to have afflicted the training facility, it is one that is likely to remain in the headlines as it prompts heated debate among citizen groups and government leaders, both here and in Puerto Rico. For decades, civilians on the island have suffered the effects of friendly fire. This time, a propitious moment may be at hand for the Pentagon to review its options and have the wisdom to dismantle the base.

The Navy's primary argument in favor of Vieques' continued use has been the unparalleled importance of the live-amunition training grounds for military readiness. The facility has been used by U.S. military personnel since 1941, when the Navy expropriated more than two-thirds of the 51-square-mile island for weapons storage and for ordnance training, involving bombings, shellings, and mock invasions.

Vieques' usefulness is indisputable. But the Navy is not the island's only tenant; a permanent community of 9,300 inhabitants occupies one-third of it. It would be disingenuous to argue that the naval presence is not detrimental to the lives and livelihoods of the local population. Far from it. This week, the Navy admitted, after years of denials, to dropping 24 napalm bombs on Vieques in

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1993. In February of this year, depleted uranium (believed to be linked to Gulf War Syndrome) was illegally discharged by Marine jets during a training exercise. On an island plagued by a cancer rate significantly higher than that of Puerto Rico, the firing of radioactive shells—only a fifth of which were actually recovered during "cleanup"—has not inspired confidence in the Navy's pledge of enhanced attention to safety. Nor is the local populace reassured by current plans to install a powerful anti-drug trafficking radar system, whose electromagnetic waves would be capable of reaching the mainland of South America.

Faced with encroaching environmental damage, stunted economic development due to declines in the fishing and tourism industries, crushing unemployment, the constant pounding of heavy artillery and the drone of low-flying aircraft, damage to building caused by vibrations from war games, and the ongoing danger of bombing accidents from ships and planes, Viequesians have been both figuratively and literally raked by all branches of the military. And not just the U.S. military. The participation of foreign armed forces as well as commercial entities has been solicited—even via advertisements on the Navy's website—for a price. The fees collected in 1998 alone amounted to \$80 million, but the increased bombing volume further strained the island's economy and worsened living conditions.

For all the Navy's purported efforts to be a good neighbor to the Viequesians, it words and deeds are today viewed with mistrust. Assurances that the accidentally discharged depleted uranium and the electromagnetic frequencies of the powerful anti-drug trafficking radar pose no threat to human health are dismissed as inaccurate, if not deliberately misleading. Shortly after the mid-May announcement that the Navy would be returning a portion of its land on Vieques to civilian jurisdiction, a fisherman found a 12-foot torpedo near the island's main town. Even the U.S. panel recently established to conduct a thorough study of the Navy's presence on Vieques is seen by skeptics as weighted toward the armed forces—only one of its four members comes from a civilian background. The unfortunate combination of military mistakes and miscalculations, together with questionable judgments and belated admissions, has created for the U.S. authorities a situation as ominous as the unexploded bombs and missiles that often appear on the beaches of Vieques. With the integrity of the inquiry already called into question, Washington will face the difficult task of defending any decision that falls short of completely phasing out the facility.

Short of the forced relocation of over 9,000 people, no modification to the current program can adequately safeguard the residents of Vieques, whereas locating a viable substitute—an unoccupied island—and installing a new training facility, while difficult and costly, remains feasible. The Pentagon has had to reject plans for bases in other locations for such reasons as proximity to population centers and the periodic presence of federally protected migratory birds. Regardless of the recommendations due in August from the commission examine future military use of the island, the White House cannot allow itself to give any less consideration to Vieques' population. Continued live-ordnance target practice on a heavily inhabited island is indefensible, and it is time for the 60-year practice to end.

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HAPPY RETIREMENT TO PATRICK
KEOHANE

HON. ROY BLUNT

OF MISSOURI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, July 27, 1999

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to note the passing of an era in the Federal Bureau of Prisons. Mr. Patrick Keohane will retire August 31 as warden of the Federal Medical Center in Springfield, Missouri. That will mark the end of a period of over 30 years in which Warden Keohane or one of his two brothers has been a warden somewhere at a federal prison in the United States. It is reportedly the longest period of similar service of any family in federal prison history.

The Keohane family association with the federal prison system goes back even further to Patrick's father Tom who retired as a senior lieutenant after 31 years of service with the Bureau of Prisons. Tom and his wife Nora raised ten children—six boys and four girls—in Springfield, Missouri. Pat and four of his five brothers served in the military.

It is only fitting that Pat is retiring while warden of the Federal Medical Center in Springfield, because it was in Springfield that he began his civilian career in criminal justice as a member of the Springfield Police Department in 1964. It was only 2 years after beginning work for the Federal Prison System in 1967 as a correctional officer that he was transferred to the Springfield facility in 1969. While there, he completed his degree in law enforcement and corrections in 1974 at Drury College.

Pat Keohane has served with distinction in federal prison facilities in Indiana, Wisconsin, Florida, Pennsylvania, New York, Kansas, and Illinois. He was promoted to warden in 1985 and since then has led facilities in Pennsylvania, Indiana, and California, returning to Springfield, Missouri in 1996.

As I mentioned earlier, service for the Keohanes in the Federal Prison System is a family thing. Two of his older brothers each retired with 27 years of service. In fact, they are the only family in the Nation in which three brothers served as wardens in the Federal Bureau of Prisons, and the only one where two brothers, both served as wardens of the same Federal institution at different times—and they accomplished that on two separate accessions.

Besides his family distinctions, Pat Keohane, has received numerous honors and recognitions, including the 1994 Warden of the Year award from the North American Association of Wardens and Superintendents and the U.S. Attorney General's Award for Distinguished Service from Attorney General Janet Reno.

He is being honored later this week at dinner in his hometown in the Seventh District of Missouri. I know that my colleagues in the House join with me in expressing their appreciation for a lifetime of outstanding service to the citizens of these great United States and best wishes for a very happy future to Warden Patrick W. Keohane of Springfield, Missouri.